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STATEMENT OF THE GENERAL DIRECTOR, A. L. A. WAR SERVICE

HERBERT PUTNAM, *Librarian of Congress*

If it shall seem odd to you that I should be addressing you from a foreign capital instead of directly from a rostrum at Asbury Park, it seems, I assure you, no less odd to me. But it is your business that keeps me in Paris, and I could not well neglect it even for the opportunity to which President Bishop invited me, of presenting to you in person a general survey of our operations. Such a survey was due to you as a recognition not merely of your interest in the work, but of your responsibility for it as an organization, and of your authority over it. He added that it was also due to myself. He had in mind, I suppose, the satisfaction that an executive feels in reporting things accomplished.

Where, however, as in this case, the things accomplished are the result not of an individual but of a united effort, the complacencies of the chief executive must be frugal. While he was carrying the title, the general direction, the overhead responsibility, there will have been others who have borne the brunt of the actual labor. One such—Carl Milam—has not merely done this, but, as acting general director, has shared the overhead responsibility itself for a long period; another—Burton Stevenson—has had to carry almost independently the direct responsibilities of the overseas service. And the direct administration has had back of it the War Service Committee, abreast of it the Finance Committee, and at its right hand—in the president of the Association—a representative of the general interest who has linked his office and his personal devotion to the work in a measure quite unprecedented. To the president of the Association, to the chairmen of the two committees, to the acting general director, and to the European representative, you will, I am sure, accord the gratitude which is their due. The French way would be to pass a resolution declaring that they have “bien mérité.” You will

not do so, for the time is not yet ripe for resolutions of that sort. And I doubt if, as concerns your war service, it ever will be ripe: for any resolution which specifies a few individuals would be unjust to a body of others so numerous as to be quite out of proportion. This results from a fact which has distinguished your war service from that of any of the other six welfare organizations; the fact that yours has been a distinctly professional work, for which you have drawn almost wholly on your own ranks as a professional organization. The significance of this came to me when, the other day, a welfare officer (an *Army* officer) down at Le Mans, remarked to me that our people were the “only ones” who “hadn’t made mistakes”: they seemed to “know their job.”

We *have* made mistakes, many of them; mistakes of fact and of calculation, inevitable, perhaps, from the novelty, the surprise, and the rapid shift of conditions. But the sort of mistake that he had in mind was the sort due to ignorance, to indifference, to lack of method (or unwisdom in method), or to personal unfamiliarity with the business. Mistakes of that sort—common phenomena in organizations which have had hastily to draft untrained personnel—our service has, I think, been remarkably free from; and in that sense I willingly accepted the encomium as due to you.

In that sense also the letter of acknowledgement from the Commander-in-chief of the Expeditionary Forces has a special significance in which you can take satisfaction. It is in the phrase that what the Association has accomplished for the A. E. F. was accomplished “with the minimum of friction and waste.” That is praise of *method*; and there is no praise which a professional organization should more gladly welcome.

When we reported to you at Saratoga,

the war effort of the United States was at its height, and the problem for us was still the problem of continuing and enlarging the established work in the camps at home, and of developing a service of supply adequate to the needs overseas.

Within six months came the armistice. The technical effect of this was merely to suspend hostilities. But it was taken as a conclusion of them. "The war was over." And the War Department announced that our troops would be brought home at once. Ignoring calculations as to transport, the imagination both of the soldiers and of the American public leaped to the expectation that they would be eating their Christmas dinner by their own firesides. Instead of this, five months later saw the majority of them still held abroad. For the bulk of them—disappointment and months of tedious waiting; months during which, lacking the excitement of battle, the absorption and preparation for it, all the stimulus of a forward effort, they slackened into a single negative desire—to be "out of it." In a strange land, with little definite military duty save a couple of hours' drill each day, without useful occupation—save in the service of supply, and subject to all the depression of homesickness, and the temptations of idleness under conditions not favorable to self-restraint, their morale was in peril to a degree which thoroughly alarmed the military authorities.

The effort of the welfare organizations, ours included, intensified to sustain it; and ours had not merely to intensify but greatly to enlarge. We had given the men books to bring over, we had supplied them with books overseas, and we had shipped thousands of books to follow them in their foreign camps. But, for the service of those books to them, we had relied upon other organizations. (We were indeed constrained to do so by the military authorities themselves.) This service had proved at many points, and in every respect, imperfect. We had evidently to create, at certain centers besides Paris, establishments of our own, administered by repre-

sentatives of our own, with professional training, and a direct responsibility. The military authorities gradually consented, and we did so. And the last few months have seen a direct service of our own, operating in every important post of the A. E. F.

This is not to imply that we discontinued or relaxed the service through the other welfare organizations; on the contrary, the effect was to enlarge and diversify this, and to give it added efficiency. Quantitatively the service through them has been the major part of the service abroad, though we have added to it a service direct to various military units. Nor must we omit to recognize the willingness and promptness with which the organizations lent to us their equipment, their facilities, and their personnel, in order to carry forward our operations. Particularly, of course, was this true of the Y. M. C. A. And in view of it we can the less complain, though from certain aspects of policy we must regret, that the credit for the service rendered through them has gone to them rather than to us.

A summary of these overseas operations (to March 31) was embodied in a report by Mr. Stevenson to accompany General Pershing's own report as Commander-in-chief; and has been communicated to you, or will be, in connection with the report of the acting general director and of the War Service Committee. In scale, the operations themselves fall far short of those at home, but in critical importance they have not done so; and the importance of them but increased, when the office of our books was no longer to prepare men to fight but to solace and occupy them in temporary inaction, and to aid in returning them better fitted for their jobs at home.

The opportunity and the duty in these respects had not been unforeseen. I indicated it at Saratoga in remarking that before long the "center of gravity" of our operations might shift overseas. I did not then suspect that the remark would come to have a personal application. But

by December it became clear that the problems abroad, which in every other welfare organization seemed to require the personal presence of its head, were for ours also such that I should aid to deal with them on the spot.

Accordingly I came. And I am still here; for the problems proved not definite and temporary but varied and cumulating—and with new ones ever developing to take the place of those already solved. Even as I write—only a month before your Conference—there are still three-quarters of a million men over here. And with the reduction of the forces, and the abandonment of areas, there is a new crop of decisions involved in the curtailment of operations, the salvage of material, and the settlement of contracts. Such decisions must be summary, and such as require ratification must be ratified promptly. So for a time I remain.

But the intensification of the work overseas has not meant a cessation of the work at home, for this had to be maintained in practically its original dimension throughout nearly the entire year. And it also involved certain new problems—in connection with reconstruction, the preparation for home service and especially for the duties of citizenship. All this will appear in the reports of the acting director and of the War Service Committee.

I am sure also that the history of the year as a whole will be presented to you both broadly and in detail by my associates at Washington, and in the report of the War Service Committee, and that the philosophy of it will also be suggested by the latter. Any larger inductions from such an experience come more appropriately from those who, like the chairman of the committee, informed as to the operations, have not been enmeshed in the routine of them. From the two years together one induction will surely be obvious: That for the first time in its history the American Library Association has emerged from an organization with aims supposedly purely professional, into a public service corporation. And though the service has in terms been for an emergency, its influence will be permanent; it will have left a definite impress upon the Government in the Departments of the Army and the Navy; it will have left a continuing benefit upon many individuals widely diffused throughout the country. It will have notified to the public the spirit and the efficiency of an organization whose availability for a general public service had not been realized, and it will have affected the Association itself with a lasting faith in its own abilities.

HERBERT PUTNAM,
General Director A. L. A. War Service.

STATEMENT OF THE ACTING GENERAL DIRECTOR, A. L. A. WAR SERVICE

CARL H. MILAM, *Director, Public Library, Birmingham, Ala.*

It is unnecessary for the acting general director, after presenting a printed report of twenty-six or twenty-seven pages, to make any considerable additional statement. Perhaps it would be well, however, without attempting to summarize the report that we have made, to point out the thread you will see running through it. Since the signing of the armistice, particularly, there have been only two things in mind. The first has been to serve the men—the duration-of-the-war men—in

such a way that we might claim to have contributed something to their general welfare, and to the placing of them back in their normal positions in civilian life. We have done that through the camp libraries, to some extent, and through the hospital libraries, and we have tried to coöperate with you in your public, college and special libraries in accomplishing that end. The other thing has been to leave behind something definitely accomplished.

When the war was over, the American